

ST. AUTONOMUS AND HIS CHURCH IN BITHYNIA

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Among the throng of martyrs whose deeds and sacrifices adorned the church of Nicomedia during the Great Persecutions, few have been the subject of traditions that provide much concrete information of historical or local interest and fewer still had cults that were of importance during late Antiquity or the Middle Ages. Although the memory of some of these saints was maintained by the Byzantines, and the cult of others was successfully transplanted to the West, little is known of their worship in and around Nicomedia, and in modern times every trace of that has vanished. The greatest local cult, and the one that was most widespread abroad, was that of St. Panteleimon, whose church stood outside the walls of the city until modern times. There is now no trace of it, however, for the whole site has succumbed to the construction of a broad modern highway whose traffic roars constantly through the middle of the modern city.

A large industrial city like Izmit, whose name preserves that of its august predecessor, might naturally be expected to obliterate the traces of its past, especially since the exchange of populations in 1923 broke the long continuity of Orthodox tradition. The countryside, though, might present a different image, for some parts of it are surprisingly remote and sparsely populated. Here one might hope for some trace of the Byzantine Church and some survival in stone of the memory of its martyrs. In fact, the situation is not very different; proximity to Izmit and Istanbul has long made old buildings of the coastal sections rich quarries for construction in the cities, and the recent growth of population in the whole region has removed most traces of the past that survived until modern times. Some buildings, though, are too large to demolish easily or have preserved an ancient function into modern times. Such are the Byzantine castles and city walls, of which a few still survive in relatively good repair to constitute the

only architectural record of Byzantium in these parts.

It was in the course of studying these fortifications, as director of a project for the British Institute of Archaeology in Ankara, that I came across the site that forms the subject of the present study. As it turned out, our team arrived a generation too late to see any trace of the once-famed church of St. Autonomus, but we were able to identify the site and thus to make it possible to visualize the setting of a church associated with two saints and one emperor, a place of some renown in late Antiquity. I offer this modest contribution to Ernst Kitzinger, who some years ago headed the committee that directed my doctoral dissertation, and who by his helpful and perceptive comments greatly influenced the direction of my work. His constant interest in combining the visual with the written record of Byzantium seems a suitable context for presenting a saint and a site, and for offering some commentary on both.

The Life of St. Autonomus survives in a rather short Metaphrastic version, a document distinguished by being far less wordy and tendentious than most acts of martyrs of the Great Persecution and by providing a good deal of specific information.¹ It reveals all that is known of the saint whose cult seems never to have spread far and who was thus not the subject of a variety of encomia. The life gives every indication of being both early and authentic.

According to this account, Autonomus was made a bishop in Italy; his birthplace is not recorded. When the persecution of Diocletian broke out he realized that he could not safely continue his mission of teaching and that his life would be in danger in Italy. He therefore left for Bithynia and arrived at a village called Soreoi, which was on

¹ PG 115, cols. 692–97 = *ActaSS*, Sep. IV.14–19; short summary in *Synaxarium CP*, 35–37.

the right as one sails into the Gulf of Nicomedia. Here he received the hospitality of a certain Cornelius, whom he converted during a long stay. He built a chapel to St. Michael and ordained Cornelius a deacon, while he himself set out on a missionary journey (as a "herald of piety" in the language of this life) to Lycaonia and Isauria. When he returned he found that his church had prospered, and he ordained Cornelius as priest. By now Diocletian had arrived in Nicomedia, the persecution had begun, and Autonomus was being sought. He thereupon left for Mantinion and Claudiopolis, cities by the Black Sea, hoping to spread the word of piety there. When this was successful, he returned to Soreoi to find the community so prospering that he raised Cornelius to the rank of bishop. Once again he set out, this time to Asia, to weed out the thorns of error and sow the seeds of piety. When these aims were accomplished, he returned to Soreoi and proceeded to Limnae, a place in the neighborhood. He found its inhabitants sunk in ignorance, but in a short time converted and baptized them.

Yet the work was far from complete because the pagans of Limnae were still celebrating their cult, making offerings on a feast day to the idols of their god. The new Christian flock was so incensed that it rushed to the temple and demolished it. The enraged pagans, determined on revenge, armed themselves with sticks and tools and stormed into the chapel at Soreoi where Autonomus was celebrating the liturgy. They drove out the congregation and attacked the priest, who gained his eternal reward as he was struck down by the altar. The saint's remains were gathered and buried in a sarcophagus by a pious deaconess named Maria who, together with women from the nearby emporia, served the church.

Sometime later, when Constantine was emperor, a certain Severianus was setting off for a new post as governor of Egypt. Since he feared travel by sea, he made the long circuit around the gulf by road until he came near the tomb of Autonomus. Suddenly his mules refused to advance and, however hard they were whipped, stood like stone upon the spot. A wise bystander explained the curious circumstance to the astonished Severianus: that the governor should build a church in honor of the holy martyr and that, if he so promised, his mules would immediately proceed. Severianus ordered the church built and continued on his way. When he returned he dedicated it to the memory of the martyr.

Many years later a priest was celebrating the liturgy when water came pouring into the church from the balconies. Since he thought that this would ultimately damage the church, he tore down the building and erected a new chapel by the sea. He did not know that Severianus had built the original church on the site of the martyr's tomb. Sixty years later, in the reign of Zeno, an excubitor, or imperial guard, named John found himself in the region of Soreoi and Limnae. Since he wanted some exercise, he went hunting and shot a hare on the very spot where the martyr had been buried. That night the martyr appeared to him in a dream, ordering him to pitch a tent in the place where he had shot the hare and to stay there as his own neighbor. John swiftly did as he was told. Years later the martyr appeared once again, revealed his identity and that his relics were buried beneath the tent. John was so struck by this vision that he revealed it to Emperor Anastasius who, although he only feigned piety, built the church which was eventually dedicated by his successor, Justin I, and was still standing in the author's day.

The author concludes by describing a glimpse he had of the saint's body in his tomb. Instead of decomposing within a few days, it had remained completely preserved for two hundred years: the hair was thick, the skin firm, and even all the hairs of the moustache were still in place. No part of the body was broken or distorted, and the open eyes seemed to be staring at the writer, who was evidently deeply impressed.

This homely biography has several peculiarities. In the first place, it differs profoundly from the usual narrative of saints who succumbed to the Great Persecution. In the normal account—and this is especially true of the saints of Nicomedia—the holy man distinguishes himself by his piety, is denounced and brought before the emperor or governor, engages in a long and defiant dialogue during which he proclaims his faith and resists all attempts to lure or force him from it, then undergoes a great range of ingenious torments which have no effect on him, and finally, as often as not, achieves the crown of martyrdom by being decapitated.² This pattern is so prevalent that its absence here is striking. St. Autonomus not only fails to conform to the normal behavior, but his career is only most loosely tied to the Persecution. He leaves Italy and avoids Nicomedia because of it, but oth-

²Such accounts are those of the so-called "epic passions," on which see H. Delehaye, *Les passions des martyrs et les genres littéraires*, SubsHag 13B (Brussels, 1966), 171–226.

erwise seems free to travel and preach throughout Asia Minor, and finally succumbs not to imperial authority but to a pagan mob. It seems possible that the author knew relatively little about the saint and placed him in the time of Diocletian because that seemed most suitable.

The life as we have it falls into two distinct parts: the account of the saint and his activities (chaps. 1–3) and the history of the church dedicated to him (chaps. 4–6). Both, but especially the first, show signs of condensation, with a few incidents remaining unexplained or without context. For example, the chapel of St. Michael where Cornelius was ordained deacon simply disappears from the subsequent account of the churches; Cornelius, though evidently of some importance since he became a bishop, is a shadowy figure who also vanishes from the scene; it is not clear whether the saint was buried at Soreoi or Limnae; and the cubicularius John, though of a very high rank, seems to spend years in a tent in the countryside. These anomalies might suggest that a much fuller account once existed. Alternatively, it is possible to dismiss the life, or at least the first part of it, as a jumbled account of little or no historical value. Such was the conclusion of the great hagiographer Hippolyte Delehaye.³

At first sight, indeed, the opening chapters do little to inspire confidence. The saint has no birthplace, his association with Italy seems irrelevant, his wanderings inexplicable, and, as noted, his connection with the Great Persecution altogether vague. The travels to far parts of Anatolia seem in fact reminiscent of saints of the iconoclastic period—Peter of Atroa or Joannicius of Mount Olympus might come to mind—who frequently made long journeys to escape persecution or to spread orthodoxy. There are parallels close at hand of victims of the persecutions at Nicomedia sharing the characteristics of this later age, with long accounts of travels and details of the local geography of Bithynia and Mysia, a country where many saints of the Dark Ages suffered persecution.⁴

More specifically, the mention of Mantinion and Claudiopolis seems to point toward the eighth or ninth century. Claudiopolis, now Bolu, is a large town on the highway between Istanbul and An-

³H. Delehaye, *Les origines du culte des martyrs*, SubsHag 20 (Brussels, 1933), 154.

⁴See, for example, the lives of SS. Quadratus (BHG, 359), Philetaerus (BHG, 1515), and Thrysus and Leucus (BHG, 1846).

kara, situated in a basin, a fertile plain surrounded by high mountains.⁵ In Antiquity it was one of the cities of Bithynia and remained a city of that ecclesiastical province throughout the Byzantine period. It rarely appears in the records of the Middle Ages, perhaps most prominently when its bishop Thomas was a leading advocate of Iconoclasm in the reign of Leo III. Mantinion was not a city but a village in the territory of Claudiopolis (here the author reveals a certain ignorance but correctly associates the two places), famed in Antiquity as the birthplace of Antinous, the favorite of Emperor Hadrian, and in the Middle Ages as the site of a large and important monastery. This was a double foundation, with a nunnery on an island in a lake and a monastery on the shore. It owed its origins to St. Anthusa who established it around 740, and it was well known in subsequent centuries. The exact location of Mantinion has been the subject of some discussion, but there is no doubt that it stood in the general region of Claudiopolis.⁶

Next, the position of Autonomus in the church is difficult to understand: he was already a bishop in Italy and evidently retained the rank in Asia Minor, since he could ordain Cornelius as deacon, priest, and bishop. Yet, if he were a bishop, where was his see, and where did Cornelius preside? The life makes no mention of any city near the scene of the action, although the south shore of the Gulf of Nicomedia contained two bishoprics, Praenetus and Helenopolis, and a third, Basilinopolis, lay somewhere in the neighborhood.⁷

Finally, the long voyages, which occupy a large part of the life, offer peculiarities. They are described in vague terms appropriate to converting pagans or eradicating heresy, but it is not evident that either of those would be appropriate activities for a bishop of a town in Bithynia. That is, he might find such work valuable in his own diocese, but he would hardly be carrying it out in remote regions. From this it might seem safest to conclude that the voyages are purely rhetorical or imaginary, inspired perhaps by the model of St. Paul. He traveled three times through Asia Minor, making

⁵The site is well described by L. Robert in *A travers l'Asie Mineure* (Paris, 1980), 104–6.

⁶See the discussions of Robert, *op. cit.*, 132–46, and C. Mango, “St. Anthusa of Mantineon and the Family of Constantine V,” *AB* 100 (1983), 401–9.

⁷On these, see R. Janin, *Les églises et monastères des grands centres byzantins* (Paris, 1975), 78–80 and index. One manuscript of the *Synaxarium CP*, p. 37, calls Autonomus bishop of Praenestos, either because of his Italian origin (i.e., as if from Praeneste) or, more probably, by a slight deformation of Praenetus, the city closest to his church.

converts and strengthening the churches. Lycaonia and Isauria in particular were scenes of his activity, and he was also associated with Italy, where he ended his career. Should Autonomus then be seen as a figure modeled on St. Paul, returning from Italy to carry out missionary activity?

Although a Pauline model would seem to have some relevance, and could be used to explain some of the journeys, the specific mention of Mantinion is incongruous. It may, however, point to a different kind of explanation for this account and enable it to be seen in a somewhat unexpected context.

Mantinion also had a reputation in late Antiquity when, like the whole region of Paphlagonia with which it was loosely associated, it was a noted center of heresy, in particular, of the Novatians. Their activity in Asia Minor is well known from the work of the church historian Socrates who wrote about 440 and was so well informed about them that he has been suspected of belonging to their sect. The Novatians originated with Novatus, a priest of Rome who had survived the persecutions of Decius (249–251). When these were over, he objected so strongly to the forgiveness and readmission of those who had lapsed by sacrificing to the pagan gods that he withdrew from the church, attracted a following, and was made bishop, to become a kind of anti-pope. He organized a church which gained adherents throughout the empire and especially in Asia Minor. His followers, known variously as Novatians or Cathars, were viewed inconsistently by the orthodox, from whom they differed only in their intransigence, following otherwise the same doctrines and practice. The two churches were sufficiently close that a Novatian bishop attended the Council of Nicaea and that its eighth canon could provide for the readmission of Cathari and their clergy, allowing the latter to retain their positions on condition of being reordained.⁸

Later, however, when the Arians were supreme in Constantinople, the Novatians were subjected to persecution. Patriarch Macedonius (342–359) was particularly severe against them. Their churches were destroyed in the capital and in Cyzicus, and individuals were afflicted by torments worthy of the Great Persecution. Socrates heard of these from an aged Novatian priest, Auxanon, who

claimed to have been present at the Council of Nicaea. Other eyewitnesses told him of one place where the persecutions had been successfully resisted. Macedonius had heard that great numbers of heretics lived in Paphlagonia, especially in Mantinion—so many that he knew that the church alone could not avail to extirpate them. He therefore called in the civil authorities and had four numeri of soldiers sent to Paphlagonia with the approval of the emperor. When they reached Mantinion they found the locals well prepared, armed with long sickles and axes and anything else they could lay their hands on. The ensuing battle claimed the life of many of the heretics, but almost all the troops were killed.⁹ The immediate aftermath of these events, which saw a rustic population (for so their weapons indicate) rising to defend its beliefs, is unknown, but it is clear that the Novatians survived in the region: Socrates reports that in his day they still preserved their strict discipline in their churches in Phrygia and Paphlagonia. These were regions especially suitable for such a sect, he wrote, because their people, more than any other, were temperate by nature, disliked circuses and the theater, objected to adultery and fornication, and strongly repressed their passions.¹⁰ One can thus imagine a dour peasantry in the remote regions of Phrygia and Paphlagonia, willingly embracing a strict puritanical doctrine and defending it with their lives.

Mantinion, then, was a notorious center of heresy, a suitable place for the labors of a saint. Yet the work of Autonomus seems to have been remarkably early, and unsuccessful. The life is set in the beginning of the fourth century. Although the connection with the Great Persecution seems slight indeed, the circumstantial account of the last two chapters indicates that memory of the saint was already faded by the early fifth century, so that the general period may be acceptable. At that time the Novatians were probably just taking root in Asia Minor, though they were sufficiently numerous by 325 to attract the attention of the Council and perhaps the activities of missionaries. Autonomus is supposed to have spread the word of piety in Mantinion and Claudiopolis and to have been well satisfied with the results, for he only returned to Bithynia after all had gone according to his wish. Since the heretics were firmly established in precisely the region of his activity at a time that was

⁸For a convenient sketch of Novatus and his church, with full references, see the article “Novatien et Novatianisme” by E. Amann in *DTC* 11 (1931), 816–49.

⁹Socrates, *HE*, II.38; cf. Robert, *op. cit.*, 139.

¹⁰Socrates, *HE*, IV.28.

certainly later, he seems to have enjoyed a remarkable failure. Perhaps, of course, the author was simply taking license with his material. But his introduction of a known center of heresy (when he could have used such a vague designation as "Asia" for the journey) seems to make the narrative much more suspect than it need be, especially if it dates to the early sixth century when the nature of such a place would have been widely known.

The problems of the life, which seem to become more incomprehensible at close range, may be resolved, at least in part, by a radical solution. If St. Autonomus had been not orthodox but a Novatian, most of the elements so far considered would fit into a plausible context. In that case he could be seen as a missionary spreading the puritanical word throughout Anatolia and especially to Mantinio, where his activities would now appear a great success, as the life tells. He could thus be seen as the founder, or one of the organizers, of a long-lived and flourishing Novatian community.

His origin, date, and position would also suit such a hypothesis. The Novatian sect started in Rome, from which Novatus wrote letters throughout the empire. Whether or not Autonomus could be seen as a disciple of the founder, his missionary activity would suit what is known of the church, and the time when the narrative is set would accord with the period when the sect was spreading. Likewise, his role as bishop would be appropriate. The Novatians had a normal hierarchy of clergy, corresponding to that of the orthodox. Autonomus could have been sent out from Rome as a bishop with the authority to ordain clergy. He may have established his base at Soreoi because it was a Novatian see, which need not have been identical with an orthodox bishopric. The canon of Nicaea certainly indicates that Novatian and orthodox bishops coexisted in some cities, and the names of their four known sees—Constantinople, Nicomedia, Nicaea, and Cotyaeum—are those of orthodox bishoprics, but the sect had many, if not most, of its adherents in remote country districts and may have set up its bishoprics close to the faithful and, perhaps, out of sight of the civic authorities. The location of the two known Novatian synods suggests that this may have been the case: they met during the reign of Valens at Pazus, a village near the sources of the Sangarius and thus in Phrygia (the site has not been identified), and in 384 at Angarum, an emporion near Helenopolis.¹¹ Since a

synod would normally be held in a place where there were numerous church members, the notion that such places could have been bishoprics gains in plausibility. Alternatively, as the *Synaxarium* indicates, Autonomus may have been bishop of Praenetus (although that city does not appear in the life), or perhaps a chorepiscopus in charge of country districts, for the canon of Nicaea seems to indicate that the Novatians also had this office.

Such a reconstruction, however hypothetical, makes it possible to see Autonomus as a real historical figure, a Novatian bishop ordained in Italy and sent to Asia Minor to spread the word of the new doctrine, and likewise to recognize Cornelius as his deputy in Bithynia. A Novatian theory would also explain why Autonomus settled in such an obscure place as Soreoi, for it was in fact in a region where the Novatians flourished. Their council of 384 was held at Angarum "near Helenopolis." The site is to be identified with the modern village of Engere, 29 km west of Yalova, and thus on the same coast and about 35 km from the site of the church of Autonomus (as will be shown). Likewise, the most famous establishment of Novatians in the region of the capital, the monastery of the Cathari (or of Kathara) was situated near the Pythian springs, the modern baths of Yalova. This was founded by the cubicularius Narses in 571 as a refuge for Cathar monks driven from Cappadocia by the orthodox. Besides being a convenient distance from the capital, the site would presumably have been one where heretic monks would find a sympathetic reception. Their heterodoxy, however, did not last long; they were seduced and converted to orthodoxy by Justin II, and their monastery long remained famous.¹² In any case, it would appear that Soreoi, whatever its exact location, was in a suitable place for a Novatian church, between rural settlements of sectarians and their bishopric of Nicomedia.

Identification of Autonomus as a Novatian raises one obvious objection: why is he a saint recognized by the Orthodox Church? The life gives a clue: little was known about him by the time it was written, and most of that concerned the rather miraculous development of his cult and the buildings associated with it. The nature of his beliefs may simply have been forgotten, yet his activity as a

¹¹ Ibid., IV.28, V.21.

¹² For name and location, both in some doubt, and its history, see Janin, *Eglises*, 158–60, and add John of Ephesus, *HE*, IV.46, to his references. I do not know whether the foundation of this monastery and the rebuilding of the church of Autonomus by an imperial cubicularius are altogether due to coincidence.

missionary and his approximate date retained. The latter provided a means of associating him with the great ecclesiastical event of the time, however awkward the method chosen by the biographer. Of course, the modification could have been deliberate and his acts as a Novatian obliterated or transformed to make his career more acceptable. Since the Novatians were so close to the orthodox, few changes might have been needed, and the memory of a holy man of a previous century, reinforced by a few miracles, might have sufficed to justify an orthodox cult.

Possible parallels for such a cult are not lacking, though it is naturally not easy to demonstrate that any saint was in origin heterodox. In the immediate region, St. Lucian of Antioch, whose cult was celebrated at Helenopolis, appears to have been an Arian. This embarrassing characteristic, which modern Catholic writers do not accept, may be deduced from the fact that all his disciples, including the notorious Arius himself, were leaders of that sect, as was his biographer Philostorgius.¹³ Similarly, there is a real possibility that the notorious Eusebius of Nicomedia, a pupil of St. Lucian and leader of the Arians in the mid-fourth century, found his way into the orthodox calendar.¹⁴ Heretics as well as orthodox were naturally the subject of veneration and biographies. A life of Novatus himself, which described his martyrdom, was circulating in Alexandria in the sixth century when it was the subject of a refutation by the bishop Eulogius.¹⁵ The heresiarch never appeared in the orthodox calendar, but the existence of his life shows that the Novatians honored their saints in much the same way as did the orthodox. Such examples prove nothing directly about Autonomus but do lend support to the notion that he may not have been quite the way he is presented and that the hypothesis of a Novatian origin, which alone appears to offer some explanation for his career, may be worth considering.

Half the life deals with the saint, the rest with his cult. After his murder, his relics were buried in a sarcophagus by the deaconess Maria and other women from the neighboring emporia. This des-

ignation is an authentic local detail which inspires confidence. The coast of the Gulf of Nicomedia was dotted with such places, commercial centers that enjoyed a status between those of city and village. They were especially numerous here—the names of several are known—and in the coastal regions of Bithynia and Thrace near the capital.¹⁶ The ladies buried the saint in an unspecified location, whether Soreoi or Limnae. It was evidently near the highway from the capital which ran along the coast, for here a miracle obliged Severianus to build the first church to the martyr, supposedly in the time of Constantine.¹⁷ The site was not on the sea, for the priest who demolished it when it was subject to water damage erected a new church on the shore. By that time, around 430, the location of the saint's tomb, and perhaps his very existence, had been forgotten.

During the reign of Anastasius (491–518) the saint revealed himself to the cubicularius John, who was stationed in the region of Soreoi and Limnae, and the emperor had a church built in his honor. According to the account, however, it was not dedicated until the time of Justin I (518–527); whether or not this was a pious fiction to avoid attributing an important church to an emperor whose orthodoxy was suspect cannot be determined.¹⁸ In any case, the church was standing and contained the miraculously preserved body of the saint when the life was written. To all appearances, this part at least is an authentic account, from a time when the events were still fresh in memory and thus probably from the early sixth century.

Much may be extracted from the life, but it does not give the exact location of the church. The first church, which Autonomus built in honor of St. Michael, and where he was murdered, was at Soreoi, a place on the south shore of the Gulf of Nicomedia. Limnae, where the saint preached, lay in the immediate vicinity. Autonomus was buried in a spot near the main highway from Constantinople but at a sufficient distance from it to be suitable for hunting. It was not on the shore. These indications point to the coast between Helenopolis, where the gulf begins, and Eribolon, the port opposite Nico-

¹³The evidence is summarized by J. M. Sauget in *Bibliotheca Sanctorum* (Rome, 1966), VIII.262–65, and discussed in full detail by G. Bardy in *Recherches sur Saint Lucien d'Antioche et son école* (Paris, 1936). Both authors reject the notion of the saint's heterodoxy.

¹⁴See the notes of H. Delehaye in his commentary on the *Martyrologium Hieronianum* in *ActaSS*, Nov. II.2.591.

¹⁵Known from the summary of Photius, *Bibliotheca*, cod. 280: PG 104, col. 354.

¹⁶See, most recently, Robert, op. cit., 75.

¹⁷A Severianus associated with Egypt did indeed live in the time of Constantine: he commanded the troops at Babylon, according to a papyrus of 325 (*PLRE*, Severianus 3). Although the identification with the Severianus of this account cannot be definitely established, the possibility arises that the name is that of an actual historical personage.

¹⁸If so, the care of the author to avoid heresy would be ironic in the light of what has been proposed here.

media. The *Synaxarium* adds some precision by associating Autonomus with Praenetus, securely identified with Karamürsel, about 8 km east of Helenopolis, the modern Hersek.

The church of St. Autonomus was the scene of a dramatic event in 602, the flight and capture of Emperor Maurice, deposed by Phocas. He and his family took refuge in the church; the emperor was detained there by arthritis but sent his son Theodosius on to seek help from the Persians. According to some sources, the imperial family was murdered on the spot; others report that they were brought back to Chalcedon and there executed.¹⁹ The sources agree, however, on the general location of the church: it was 150 stades from Constantinople, near Praenetus, and, as the latest—a writer of the fourteenth century whose account is closely based on earlier historians—adds, at a place called “Soreei.”²⁰ Although the distance of 150 stades, about 30 km, is only half that from the capital to the southern shore of the gulf, the other indications correspond with those of the life: the church was on or near the shore, in the vicinity of Praenetus.

More significant details come from the account of the visit that St. Theodore of Syceon paid to the church in 612, early in the reign of Heraclius and just prior to the devastating Persian invasions that soon left a permanent mark on the country.²¹ The holy man was returning from a stay in the capital, where he had blessed the emperor, and arrived in Nicomedia to be greeted with great enthusiasm. He stayed in the monastery of Optatianae outside the walls of the city and there received throngs of the faithful, among them a deacon from the port of Calleon near the church of St. Autonomus. While still in Constantinople Theodore had been invited to visit the monastery of St. Autonomus by its abbot Paul and had willingly accepted since he wished to honor the memory of the saint. Consequently the assistant abbot and a party of monks arrived at Optatianae with a train of horses to escort him. It is evident from this that the cult of Autonomus had prospered considerably in the previous century and that the church of those days was now the center of an important monastery.

The monks led Theodore from the city by the

¹⁹ See *Chronicon Paschale*, 674; Theophylact Simocatta, 340; Theophanes, 288 f; and Nicephorus Callistus, PG 147, col. 408.

²⁰ See the passages of *Chronicon Paschale*, Theophylact, and Nicephorus Callistus cited in the previous note.

²¹ For what follows, see *Vie de Théodore de Sykéon*, ed. A. J. Festugière, SubsHag 48 (Brussels, 1970), chaps. 157, 158.

coastal road. They spent the first night at Eribolon where the saint cured a young man who was possessed.²² The next day they passed Latomion (“The Quarry”), where Theodore prayed in the oratory of St. George, and continued to Myrokopion (“Perfumery”) where he prayed in the chapel of the Virgin. As they advanced from there to Heraclion, they encountered a mad cleric who ran away, throwing off his turban and dropping his oil flask and towel before the saint could cure him. Finally, they continued on their way and were greeted with candles, incense, and psalms by a joint procession from the emporion and the monastery, and were thus conducted to the church.

Theodore prayed in the church, then descended to the tomb of the saint, kissed his relic, and celebrated mass together with all the monks. During his stay at the monastery he received great crowds of visitors from the coastal and mountain regions, from Helenopolis and Pylae. Some brought their sick to be healed, others oil and water to be blessed for use in curing man and beast and in ensuring the productivity of trees, vineyards, fields, and gardens, as well as for the cleansing of places haunted by demons. The confusion from the throngs lasted three days. Then, after blessing the monks and the monastery, Theodore prepared to depart for Nicomedia. Once again, he had an escort from the monastery and the emporion, this time swollen by the inhabitants of the neighboring emporia, who brought their candles and incense. All along his route he was met by processions and by the faithful who begged his favor. Finally, when he arrived at the ferry of Diolkides and went into the church of the Virgin, the local fishermen persuaded him to cross directly to the opposite shore, which he did, blessing a great crowd of fishermen in their boats as he passed. He landed at Elaia and continued to Nicomedia.

This vivid account of the actions of a holy man at the very end of Antiquity indicates the wealth of the monastery and the renown of the cult, and provides many topographical details of interest. The church was near a port called Calleon, it was reached by the coastal road that led through Eribolon, Latomion, and Myrokopion, and it was closely associated with the emporion of Heraclion. Monastery and port evidently stood in close proximity, since joint processions from both greeted the

²² The site of Eribolon has recently been identified: see S. Öğüt-Polat and S. Şahin, “Katalog der bithynischen Inschriften im archäologischen Museum von Istanbul,” *Epigraphia anatolica* 5 (1985), 104 f.

saint and saw him on his way. Between them and Nicomedia lay Diolkides and Elaia, connected by a ferry. Most of these places cannot now be identified, but the ferry has plausibly been located at the narrow point of the gulf, about 10 km west of Nicomedia, where the modern Zeytin Burnu ("Olive Point") may preserve the name of Elaia.²³ Most significant, however, is the association of the church with Heraclion, for that still survives as a coastal village, Ereğli, 22 km west of Nicomedia and only 4 km east of Karamürsel, the ancient Praenetus. The church is thus to be sought in the neighborhood of the village that occupied a location suitable to the indications of the sources.

Our disciplines are often less systematic than they appear, and I can report discovery of the site of the monastery not from detailed study of the text but by chance. In the summer of 1984 our team was surveying Byzantine fortifications in the province of Nicomedia. We knew of a castle in the valley of the Dracon above Helenopolis and had read reports of others west and southwest of Nicomedia in the works and maps of the admirable Major von Diest whose writings, produced at the end of the last century, have done so much to illuminate the topography of western Asia Minor.²⁴ The former, Çoban Kalesi ("Shepherd's Fort"), still occupies a dominating position at the narrow point of the valley which the highway from the capital to the interior long followed; it is probably to be identified with the Xerigordos mentioned in the accounts of the First Crusade.²⁵ The others, as we discovered, had disappeared or been reduced to shapeless heaps of rubble. In the course of our exploration we noticed a striking steep hill just behind the narrow coastal strip and mostly detached from the neighboring mountains (Fig. 1). It contained a village on its summit and looked like a natural site for a fortification because of its size and shape and because it dominated the coastal road which here necessarily follows an ancient and natural route (Fig. 2). It had a small port nearby, one of the many that adorn the fertile shores of this riviera (Fig. 3).

The landscapes of this district are magnificent: the gulf is fringed on both sides by narrow coastal

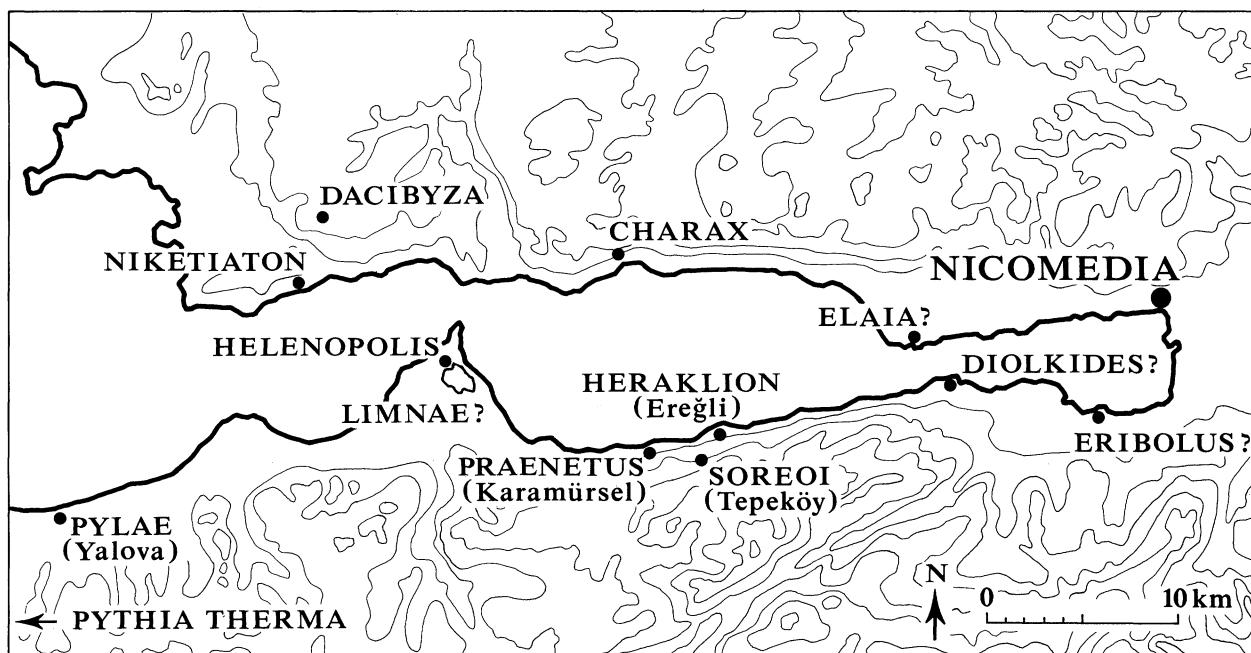
plains, with high wooded mountains rising behind them. The whole region is lush with a thick subtropical vegetation, and the plains are intensely cultivated. The south coast in particular presents a long series of small resort towns, practically contiguous with each other. The appearance of a paradise on earth, however, is slightly deceptive, for a closer view reveals that many of the houses on the shore are closed even in summer and that the beaches are deserted. This coast has in recent years had the misfortune of becoming one of the most noxious in Turkey, with the overflow of pollutants from the factories of Izmit so overpowering that all the beaches of the gulf have been closed and its natural function as a resort suspended.

On our return from the sites described by von Diest, we decided to investigate this apparent natural fortification. We followed the steep and winding road that leads from Ereğli up to the village of Tepeköy. Modern bureaucracy has typically imposed this banal name, "Hill Village," on the former Ereğli-i Bala, "Upper Ereğli," a toponym that immediately reveals a close connection between the port and the hilltop village. Tepeköy has every characteristic of an Italian hill town with houses tightly crowded along one or two streets and a small square. It occupies the long and narrow prow-shaped top of the hill. In response to our inquiries, the friendly inhabitants assured us that there was no fortification nor had there been one in living memory or tradition. They did tell us, however, that a large ancient stone building had once occupied the site of their school, which stood at the point of the prow overlooking the last bend in the road as it approached the village. The site is an impressive one, offering magnificent views over the gulf and along the shore, and one easy to defend. Its remains, however, were insignificant, for the builders of the school some thirty years ago had done their work thoroughly. Only a few cut blocks of limestone survived in the foundations to indicate that a substantial structure had stood here in the remote past. We had nevertheless found the site of the famed monastery without looking for it. The hilltop, with its remains of an ancient building, corresponds completely with the descriptions of the sources. It stands above the coast and the road, yet is not on either; rather, it is set back in a location where a hunter might reasonably have sought game above the cultivated fields. It is naturally connected with the port of Ereğli, the ancient Heraclion, and in a region filled with small ports

²³Janin, *Eglises*, 92.

²⁴See the recent appreciation of him in Robert, op. cit., 28 f and index.

²⁵This and the other fortifications of the province will be published as *Medieval Castles of Anatolia. Survey II: Izmit*, now in preparation.



The Gulf of Nicomedia and adjacent sites (map: Elizabeth Wahle)

or emporia. The shape of the hill corresponds with its ancient name, for Soreos means "heap" or "mound."²⁶

The church of St. Autonomus, dedicated, as it seems, to a heretic, could trace its origins back to the days of the Great Persecution. During late Antiquity it changed and grew, assuming a new shape in the early sixth century and rising to great fame and prosperity by the early seventh. It evidently survived into the Dark Ages, for an abbot of St. Autonomus was present at the Second Council of Nicaea in 787.²⁷

The fate of the monastery in later ages is unknown, but the hill it stood on does appear once in history. John Vatatzes, after his recapture of the theme of Optimaton (the region of Nicomedia) from the Latins in 1240, made a substantial donation of land to the patriarchal church, then based in Nicaea. Among the properties transferred was the whole territory of Heraclion with its port, var-

ious villages and fields, and the castle that the inhabitants had built on Megalophos.²⁸ Considering the topography of the site, with a large and naturally defensible hill rising directly behind the port, the identification of Megalophos with the hill of Soreoi seems certain. In that case, the hill finally was fortified, though whether or not the townsmen of the thirteenth century were the first to do so cannot be determined. Directly behind the modern school a small section of rubble wall is visible below a modern concrete wall. It preserves a trace of a facing in roughly coursed fieldstones of a type frequently found in late walls in western Asia Minor. It may thus represent a fragment of the fortification mentioned in the document. The surviving section, however, is too scanty to provide real evidence. Whatever the size or date of the fortification, the church, or a successor, evidently survived into modern times, for the detailed map of this part of Turkey drawn by the German general staff in 1941 indicates a church at Tepeköy. This, of course, may have been a modern establishment, but the blocks we saw certainly indicate an antique predecessor. The map thus confirms the identity of the site and incidentally provides the only modern reference to the church, which appears never to have been visited.

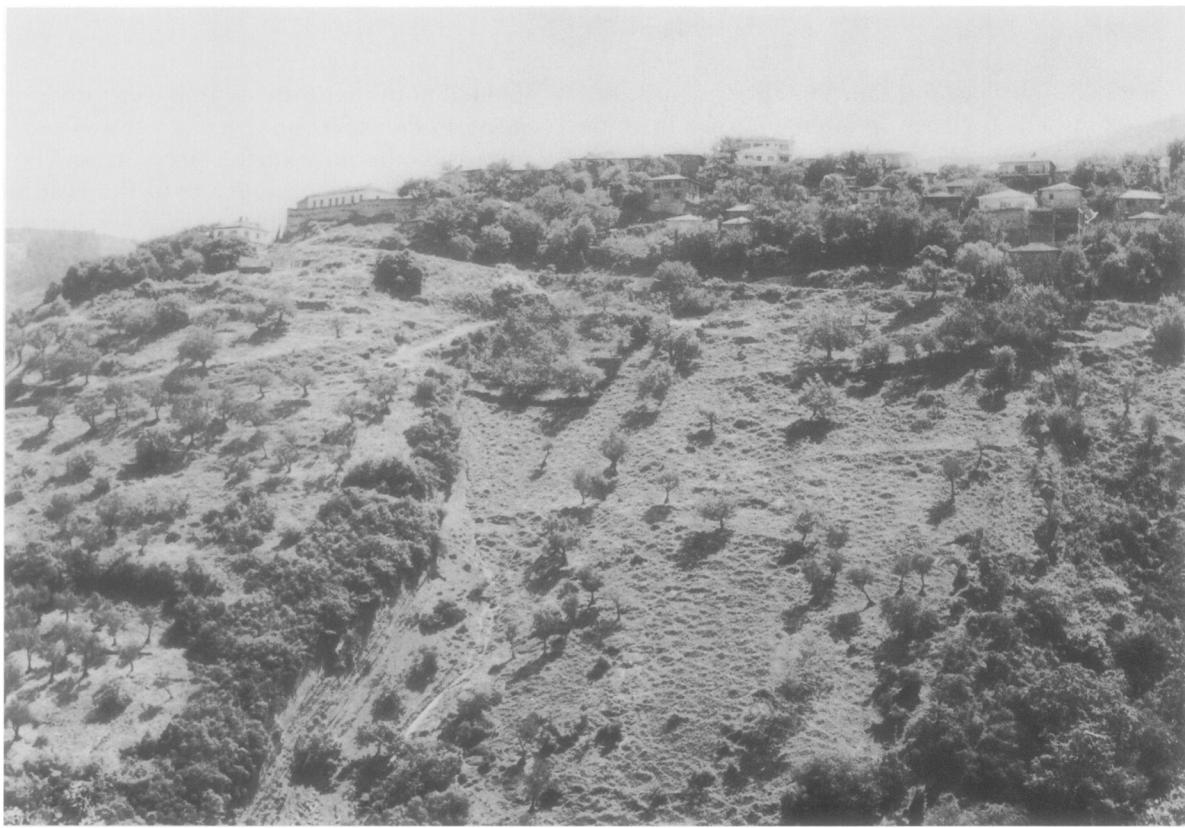
²⁶ It is not clear why the name should be in the plural here, nor are there any lakes nearby to explain the toponym Limnae. There is, however, a lake—or rather a lagoon—adjacent to Helenopolis, and a village there, which is still in the immediate vicinity, could have been the scene of the saint's labors.

²⁷ Mansi, 13, col. 152; Janin, *Eglises*, 432, no. 32. It is unlikely that this notice, contained in a list of monks primarily from Bithynia, refers to a monastery in the capital or elsewhere, for the cult of Autonomus seems never to have been widespread, and no church dedicated to him is recorded in Constantinople.

²⁸ Zepos, *Jus*, I, 661.



1. The hill of Tepeköy



2. The village of Tepeköy; the large building, second from the left, is the site of the church



3. Heracleion, as seen from the church

The church, like the saint and the monks, has now vanished, for such is often the case in these populated areas. Wealth from trade and fishing, and in modern times from the navy and luxury, has brought prosperity to the region and with it the demand for new buildings. Except for a few castles, old structures have succumbed to this natural progress, so that only the faintest reminder of the saint has survived to indicate the site where his worship once flourished. The few blocks now vis-

ible tell nothing of the church except that it was of stone, and excavation (even if it were ever likely) is impossible because of the presence of the school. Yet the site is there, and worth the visit, not only for its natural beauty but to enable a lost legend of late Antiquity to be situated and visualized in a real setting.

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